



The STEWARD

North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation
www.ncsparks.net for State Parks Info and Events

Michael F. Easley
Governor

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William G. Ross Jr.
Secretary, DENR

PARK ATTENDANCE REMAINS STRONG

(Complete 2005 visitation statistics are on Page 7).

In a year of unpredictable gas prices, but predictably mild Carolina weather, attendance at state parks in 2005 reached 12.35 million visits, a five percent increase over the 11.77 million visits in 2004.

The attendance figure is among the highest in the parks system's history, and is almost two and a half times higher than 25 years ago (about 5 million in 1980). The record for attendance at state parks was set in 2002 with 13.2 million recorded visits.

"North Carolinians and visitors to our state obviously appreciate what our state parks have to offer and we're proud of that," said Lewis Ledford, director of the Division of Parks and Recreation. "We consider each visit as an opportunity for the state to put its best foot forward and an opportunity for us to help yet another person connect with the natural world."

Since the parks' record year in 2002,

COMPETITION KEEN FOR NEW RANGERS

Aside from inequitable salary scales, there are new reasons that recruiting the best and brightest for careers in the state parks is becoming harder than ever, according to some of the professors who are among the last to see potential new rangers out the doors of North

**THIS EDITION OF THE STEWARD
SPONSORED BY
NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR
THE NEW RIVER (SEE PAGE 3)**



JORDAN LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA SAW THE LARGEST INCREASE IN VISITATION DURING 2005 WITH MORE THAN 1.4 MILLION VISITORS.

weather for outdoor recreation has often bounced between the extremes of drought and flood, often hurricane-induced. A string of hurricanes in 2004 caused significant damage and closures in some western parks.

The year 2005 was altogether different.

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Carolina universities.

State parks now compete directly with commercial recreation and private environmental companies, sometimes in fields that didn't even exist a few decades ago, the professors said in a forum "Recreation Trends and Curriculum Development" held during the division's annual superintendent's conference in November.

The forum drew together ranking professors from three universities that regularly

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WESTERN EDUCATION CENTER PLANNED

A unique agreement between two state agencies allows the state parks system to begin planning for its third environmental education center.

A center at South Mountains State Park in Burke County, specifically designed to accommodate people with disabilities, will become part of a system serving the mountain, piedmont and coastal regions of the state. The parks system has environmental education centers

at The Summit at Haw River State Park in Rockingham County and at Goose Creek State Park in Beaufort County.

Under the agreement, the Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHS) transferred 454 acres to the park. That agency and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will collaborate on development of the learning center.

Bill Ross, secretary of

DENR, said, "Through this agreement, we have preserved an important piece of North Carolina's natural heritage and embarked on a very special partnership to serve the needs of all the people of our state. In developing this state-of-the-art learning center, we can create a model for similar efforts in the future."

DHHS has pledged to advise state parks on accessibility standards and needs as part of the design and development process for the new center. And, it will assist in obtaining funds for the center's development, particularly through federal grants for which DHHS is eligible.

"South Mountains State Park is an excellent location to extend our network of environmental education centers. These centers further our mission of educating citizens about the importance of the state's natural resources," said Lewis Ledford, director of the state parks system.

The property is located on the northwest boundary of the Clear Creek section of the park and offers ready access to both that park area near US 64 and the Henry Fork section just to the southeast. The Jacob's Fork section farther east contains most park facilities.

Formerly known as the School for the Deaf watershed, it is no longer used for water supply and has limited use for the school.

"The School for the Deaf has been a very responsible steward of this property for many years, said DHHA Secretary Carmen Hooker Odom. "With this agreement, we have the opportunity to continue that stewardship and to assist in the creation of a learning institution that will serve the diverse needs of all people."

From The Director's Desk

About 859 years ago, our forbears were tooling around in wooden-wheeled carts and most of them were convinced that the Earth was flat and that demons inhabited the forests. Put another way, 859 years is a very long time.

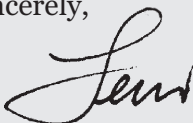
In the past five years, 36 of our colleagues have retired from the state parks system. Their careers represent 859 years of actual service to our division, to the people of North Carolina and to our mission. Nineteen of the retirees were park superintendents or administrative program managers, including the director.

There's no doubt there has been a changing of the guard.

Personnel staff helped me compile this statistic in preparing to recognize the retirements of Mike Seigh and Kenny McGrady, noted in this edition of The Steward. Mike and Kenny are among retirees representing what I call the "Seventies group" of that era when the system saw a spurt of growth with land acquisitions and new parks taking shape. It was similar for other natural resource agencies, given the emphasis and opportunities provided by initiatives such as the Land and Water Conservation program.

Again, we are experiencing a growth spurt, with new parks and state natural areas coming on line, a long list of capital projects under way, plus many new initiatives and partnerships in view. This time around, there's the additional challenge of maintaining our momentum and professionalism while losing ready access to the accumulated knowledge from those 859 years. So, those of us in our current roles have a greater awareness than ever that we are "standing on the shoulders," so to speak, of those who so capably served before us.

Sincerely,



Lewis Ledford

COMMITTEE HELPS PRESERVE NEW RIVER

The National Committee for the New River (NCNR) is a 30-year-old (501c3) non-profit conservation organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing the unique natural and cultural characteristics of the New River and its watershed. In the 1960s and 1970s, NCNR spearheaded an effort to preserve the New River against two proposed dams by American Electric Power that would have flooded 42,000 acres of land in Virginia and North Carolina.

In 1976, 26.5 miles of the South Fork New River and main stem in North Carolina were designated a federal Wild and Scenic River. With this designation, New River State Park was created.

The park operates within the scenic river section with three main access areas as well as other access points along the river. NCNR has partnered with the park to help preserve the scenic

viewshed along the river and has helped add properties to the park as well. Without these purchases the land would have likely been developed into second home communities.

In 1994, NCNR helped secure 112 acres near the Alleghany Access. Four years later, NCNR added 50 acres to the park along the South Fork, and in 2004, NCNR closed on the 110-acre New River Heights property adjacent to the 50 acres purchased in 1998. Together these parcels preserve almost a mile of river frontage.

Also each fall, NCNR and the park partner for North Carolina Big Sweep. Hundreds of volunteers canoe the river picking up trash along the way. Throughout the years the New River Big Sweep's 1,100 volunteers have collected over 40 tons of trash and 1,100 tires. The 2006 New River Big Sweep is scheduled for Sept. 23.

The New River is older than the mountains around it. The very elements making the New River unique and precious are the very ones that put it at risk. The direction of its future depends on the commitment of people who treasure it.

Members of the National Committee for the New River are a key part of NCNR's success in protecting the river and its watershed. Members provide the financial support for important projects. Members also give added strength to NCNR's voice when working on problems that affect the river. Please help us protect and preserve this national treasure!

You may send membership donations to: National Committee for the New River, PO Box 1480, West Jefferson, NC 28694.

For more information, contact NCNR at: 336-246-4871 or info@ncnr.org. Website is www.ncnr.org.

RANGERS

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educate the pool of future state park rangers. It was moderated by Phil McKnelly, former division director and a former faculty member at North Carolina State University.

The panel members were Wayne Williams of Appalachian State University's Department of Health, Leisure Exercise and Science, Joe Fridgen of East Carolina University's Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, and Roger Moore of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management at NCSU.

"We've seen opportunities in commercial recreation explode. Students

now have a lot of opportunities I didn't have when I was in school," said Williams.

Fridgen added that other competitors offering new types of jobs include private environmental firms and consultants, resort developments, utilities and local governments.

The state parks system has more than 150 ranger positions, and recruitment of highly qualified candidates is a priority. Rangers must have at least a two-year degree in a parks management, recreation or natural resources curriculum and be willing to undergo training as a law enforcement officer.

Tom Jackson, the division's west district superintendent and a former chief ranger, told the forum that, over the past few years, the number of high-quality applicants has decreased noticeably.

Moore said the same has been noticed at the university level. In his college, Moore said, those on the curriculum track as potential park rangers are among the best students, but their numbers have remained about the same while their representation as a percent of all students in Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management has shrunk (now about 10 percent).

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"There was an awful lot of pretty weather and the holidays were just out-of-this-world busy," said Bryce Fleming, superintendent of Falls Lake State Recreation Area, which ranked in 2005 as the state's busiest park with 1.63 million visits, a nine percent increase over 2004.

Fleming said Kerr Lake seemed to become more popular than ever for people within an hour's drive time, suggesting that record gasoline prices may have had an effect. During January, the recreation area also posted a record number of reservations for the coming year, he said.

The recreation areas at all three central North Carolina reservoirs posted significant gains in visitation, with Falls Lake up 26 percent to 877,566 and Jordan Lake up 55 percent to 1.45 million.

Jordan Lake, with more than 1,000 campsites, filled to capacity for about eight weekends last year with traffic on Saturdays and Sundays overflowing onto US 64. "We were hugely busy," said Superintendent Greg Schneider.

"And, the Hispanic community has truly embraced this park, and to that we can attribute much of the additional day use."

Schneider said the park's annual "Heritage Day" festival in the fall also set an attendance record.

Traditionally, the state parks system ranks third among tourism destinations in the state, behind the Concord Mills shopping mall in Cabarrus County and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Curiously, attendance on the parkway dropped in 2005 to 18.6 million visitors, down 6.3 percent from 2004. Some sections of the roadway were closed during the year for repairs of hurricane damage, and one section near Linville remains closed.

That construction was the biggest reason why Mount Mitchell State Park saw its largest-ever drop in attendance, down 47 percent from 2004 with 229,039 visits, said Superintendent Jack Bradley. At various times during the year, parkway approaches to the mountain were closed from the north or from the south or from

both directions.

"You should have been here when we were at the end of the road, so to speak," Bradley said. "There were people wanting to get here, and there were people here wanting to get out. Of course, there was frustration."

By contrast, the end of road construction and major hurricane repairs at South Mountains State Park in Burke County prompted that park's visitation to jump from 49,194 in 2004 – when the park was often closed entirely – to 192,440 last year.

At Jones Lake State Park in Bladen County, visitation dropped 20 percent, as day-use areas and the swimming area were closed during construction of a new visitor center. Likewise, at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park in Wayne County, visitation dropped 23 percent as the swimming lake was drained to allow for dam repairs.

Among traditional state parks (no recreation areas), Fort Macon State Park remained the busiest during 2005 with 1.2 million visitors, a decrease of 7 percent from 2004.

RANGERS

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Fridgen added, "We're losing our young people in terms of contact with nature."

The professors noted that some students initially interested in careers as rangers are turned off by the requirements for law enforcement while some others are deterred by the requirements for hard-science classes.

"The field is changing, and how it's perceived by young

people is changing," said Fridgen.

"At the same time, we're not seeing a wave of change in the make-up of our applicant pool," added Moore.

Fridgen said that more different kinds of people are using state parks for more types of recreation, but that those people are not considering the parks for potential careers. "It's not a future that they're seeking there; it's just a place to hang

out. As we see this diversity of use, we need to cultivate a diversity of leadership down the line."

Moore said that the universities are constantly looking for ways to fine-tune their curriculums to direct the best students toward the right careers. This includes establishing advisory groups for curriculums and talking frequently with the schools' alumni, he said.

SEIGH RECOGNIZED UPON RETIREMENT

Along with the usual awards and accolades common at a retirement, Park Superintendent Mike Seigh Jan. 21 carried home the highest award of the American Red Cross for lifesaving efforts.

He was presented the Certificate of Merit for coming to a seizure victim's aid at the state Fair in Raleigh, said Mira Batchelor, a Red Cross official.

Few people in the room were surprised.

During 31 years of service with the state parks system as a ranger and superintendent, Seigh gained a reputation for wading into tough situations equipped with his skills and a galvanized optimism.

"We've known you as someone who had a lot of impact," Susan Tillotson, chief of operations, told Seigh during the retirement ceremony. "Not the least is that which you had on coworkers and the people you supervised."

Seigh won a department Heroism Award in 1981 for dragging a potential drowning victim to shore at Fort Macon State Park while a senior ranger there.

A native of Havelock, Seigh worked as a lifeguard and park attendant at Fort Macon during summers as he attended North Carolina State University. A few months after graduation in 1973, he became an entry-level ranger.

In 1982, he moved to Hammocks Beach State Park as superintendent. In 1987, he became superintendent at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. With six rangers and four maintenance mechanics, he managed a new and often-rowdy array of sites that filled to capacity on warm weekends with a population the size of a small town.

Seigh was superintendent of the park for 15 years as its annual visitation double. He then moved in 2002 to what would become another tough assignment at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.

Just a few months after he arrived, the division restricted the use of a popular four-wheel-drive beach access area. The program unleashed a virulent backlash from some in the local community.

Throughout, Seigh's professionalism and diplomacy helped defuse the situation, said Jud Burns, south district superintendent.



COLLEAGUES GATHER TO HONOR McGRADY

A group of colleagues, friends and family gathered at Lake Norman State Park Dec. 14 to honor the career of Kenny McGrady who retired as maintenance supervisor for the west district after 25 years with the state parks system.

McGrady was one of the men who kept the state parks system running in some lean years.

"Kenny's contributions were tremendous, not just in the west district, but throughout the state parks system," said Division Director Lewis Ledford. "In an agency full of resourceful, hardworking people, Kenny always stood out as someone who could get the job done, whatever it might be."

McGrady joined the division in 1980 as one of a select group of jacks-of-all-trades who traveled the entire state under the direction of Leon Carter, tackling jobs that demanded a considerable diversity of skills. As jobs became more specialized in the state parks, maintenance mechanics were added to park staffs. Later, maintenance supervisory positions were added for each of four districts.

McGrady grew up in Wilkes County and graduated from North Wilkes High School in 1970. He spent 13 years with the National Guard as a staff sergeant and construction foreman. Through the

guard and by operating his own business, he became a proficient carpenter, electrician, plumber, mason and heavy equipment operator.

In an early job application, he wrote, "I perform best when I am challenged by a difficult task and a large amount of responsibility."

He found such challenges in the state parks system with its slim maintenance budgets in the 1970s. He worked in a temporary job at Stone Mountain State Park before joining the division full time in 1980. After seven years traveling the state, McGrady spent two years as west district maintenance crewman. In 1989, he became Pilot Mountain State Park's first maintenance mechanic before taking on the west district supervisory job in 1990.

McGrady was also an American Red Cross first responder and won a division Special Achievement Award in 1993.



NEW PARKS AMONG '05 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The year 2005 witnessed some significant advances for the state parks system, according to year-end reports prepared for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The Division of Parks and Recreation further implemented its New Parks for a New Century initiative with the General Assembly's authorization of new state parks at Carver's Creek in Cumberland County and at Hickory Nut Gorge in Rutherford County.

The division is developing land acquisition strategies for both parks with the help of land conservancies and the state's three conservation trust funds.

(In January, the first 588-tract at Hickory Nut Gorge was purchased from the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy. And, purchase of the first acreage for Carver's Creek Sandhills State Park is expected in the spring.)

Other notable accomplishments during the year included:

- The division incorporated the former Brown's Summit Center in Rockingham County into Haw River State Park with an allocation from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and is creating the state parks system's first residential environmental education center. Now known as The Summit at Haw River State Park, the center's existing education programs will be folded into the parks system's environmental education efforts.

- The acquisition of 2,915 acres for Lake James State Park was completed early in 2005, and the division began reworking the park's master plan. The acquisition, representing about 30 miles of shoreline, protects critical watershed and viewshed areas in Burke County and provides room for much-needed recreation facilities. A design contract is being prepared for the first phase of facility development.

- A new 6,273-square-foot visitor center and extensive renovations to related visitor facilities at Jones Lake State Park in Bladen County were completed representing an investment of \$2.42 million. Also, new visitor centers are under development at New River, South Mountains and Merchants Millpond state parks and Dismal Swamp State Natural Area.

- A new access area providing day-use recreation and overnight camping was provided along the Lumber River in Scotland County.

- A \$2 million project expanded overnight camping facilities at Stone Mountain State Park in

Wilkes County with 40 new campsites and a new washhouse.

- A record \$13.7 million was channeled into local park acquisition and improvement projects through 50 grants from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, administered by the division. In the 11-year history of the fund, more than \$74 million has been awarded through 422 matching grants to municipal and county recreation programs in all areas of the state.

- A pay disparity study was completed by the Office of State Personnel and that agency recommended that all division employees with law enforcement certification be revised upward by two pay grades.

There were also a number of significant land conservation projects during the year.

- Land acquisition efforts continued at the new Mayo River State Park in Rockingham County. The acreage of the park doubled during the year to 1,588 acres to include the Old Mayo Park. Funds from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund were also set aside to renovate an historic building at that site.

- More than 2,500 acres were purchased or accepted through donation to create a new Scuppernong River Section at Pettigrew State Park in Washington and Tyrell counties. This is an important conservation effort along one of the state's last undeveloped river corridors, allowing for protection of rare species and habitat.

- The Nature Conservancy's North Carolina chapter donated 686 acres of the total and was instrumental in helping protect more than four miles of river frontage.

- The Nature Conservancy donated 785 acres on The Peak, Ashe County's highest mountain, and it was added to Elk Knob State Natural area, expanding that two-year-old park unit to more than 2,000 acres.

- A 113-acre tract – formerly the Eure property – was added at William B. Umstead State Park that will provide an important buffer to development at the park's northern boundary along US 70.

A final accomplishment for which the division is especially proud represented a bit of national recognition.

North Carolina's state parks system was one of four finalists for the 2005 Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management presented by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration. The Gold Medal Awards are considered the most prestigious in the field of

North Carolina State Parks

Monthly Attendance Report

2005

PARK	DECEMBER 2005	TOTAL YTD DEC. 2005	DECEMBER 2004	TOTAL YTD DEC. 2004	% CHANGE (2004/2005)	
					DEC.	YTD
Carolina Beach	8,648	239,064	5,885	217,191	47%	10%
Cliffs of the Neuse	3,922	94,342	3,245	122,071	21%	-23%
Crowder's Mountain	17,293	339,572	18,992	364,098	-9%	-7%
Eno River	14,175	313,034	16,341	298,989	-13%	5%
Falls Lake	13,502	877,566	17,096	694,292	-21%	26%
Fort Fisher	22,500	629,263	21,631	740,377	4%	-15%
Fort Macon	36,692	1,201,650	35,354	1,297,106	4%	-7%
Goose Creek	8,705	142,637	6,799	140,092	28%	2%
Gorges	1,665	108,504	3,733	134,072	-55%	-19%
Hammocks Beach	4,815	133,719	4,854	133,953	-1%	0%
Hanging Rock	11,895	382,546	10,780	329,520	10%	16%
Jockey's Ridge	19,692	962,251	16,530	871,572	19%	10%
Jones Lake	4,772	79,012	3,332	99,362	43%	-20%
Jordan Lake	15,846	1,453,261	15,948	939,362	-1%	55%
Kerr Lake	36,712	1,634,052	46,228	1,506,020	-21%	9%
Lake James	12,901	381,648	27,944	437,563	-54%	-13%
Lake Norman	20,418	461,712	19,818	445,275	3%	4%
Lake Waccamaw	4,636	85,524	5,018	95,074	-8%	-10%
Lumber River	6,460	68,829	1,930	63,142	235%	9%
Medoc Mountain	1,650	47,170	1,348	56,270	22%	-16%
Merchant's Millpond	8,636	218,516	8,572	197,830	1%	10%
Morrow Mountain	4,930	201,970	5,560	259,580	-11%	-22%
Mount Jefferson	2,840	79,295	4,380	94,677	-35%	-16%
Mount Mitchell	676	229,039	3,425	434,374	-80%	-47%
New River	8,286	143,030	5,704	162,473	45%	-12%
Occoneetchee Mountain	2,408	51,789	2,558	40,853	-6%	27%
Pettigrew	2,859	70,847	1,632	74,384	75%	-5%
Pilot Mountain	13,050	396,539	14,844	383,752	-12%	3%
Raven Rock	4,293	105,903	3,831	106,763	12%	-1%
Singletary Lake	1,354	41,632	2,258	37,643	-40%	11%
South Mountains	8,668	192,440	0	49,194	0%	291%
Stone Mountain	14,604	378,312	17,984	425,988	-19%	-11%
Weymouth Woods	3,308	42,740	3,279	44,639	1%	-4%
William B. Umstead	22,008	560,378	18,380	473,372	20%	18%
SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL	364,819	12,347,786	375,213	11,770,923	-3%	5%

Mission

The mission of the North Carolina Division of Parks & Recreation is:

to protect North Carolina's natural diversity;

to provide and promote outdoor recreation opportunities throughout North Carolina;

and

to exemplify and encourage good stewardship of North Carolina's natural resources

for all citizens and visitors of North Carolina.

SAFETY ZONE

Keep Safety Firmly At Hand

✓Be aware of where your hands are and keep them out of harm's way.

✓Stay focused.
Complacency and lack of attention are preventable causes of many accidents.

✓Never remove or alter machine guards or override safety devices.

✓Identify and avoid possible pinch points on tools, equipment and machinery.



The Steward

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